

Dawah Monthly

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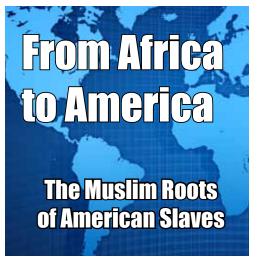
February 2014

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From Slavery To Freedom The Story of Bilal ibn Rabah Islam's First Muezzin





From Africa to America

The Muslim Roots of American Slaves

Most of the African slaves sent to North America came from West Africa. They were men, women and children captured and sold to slave traders, forced on to ships, and kept in appalling conditions for the long journey to the Americas. It is thought by modern historians that at the height of the slave trade, the 18th century, up to 7 million Africans had undertaken this voyage. It is also estimated that up to 30% of the enslaved in North America were Muslim.

To understand the history of Muslim slaves in North America it is necessary to know something about slavery as it previously existed in Africa and the history of Islam in Africa, particularly in West Africa. Islam first reached West Africa by way of traders from North Africa and the Middle East. They settled in the area from as early as the tenth century BCE and thus began a slow and peaceful process brought about by trade. The journey from North Africa across the Sahara was done in stages. Goods passed through a chain of Muslim traders and were purchased finally by non-Muslims at the southern end of the route. Until the first half of the 13th century the kingdom of Ghana was a key trading partner with the Muslim North. Over the next five hundred years, assorted West African rulers and local merchants who wanted to do business with the Muslim traders adapted themselves to Islam and its customs. Islam itself had a reputation of absorbing local customs thus the transition was smooth. However the majority of West African people did not convert to Islam until well into the 18th century, which just happened to be at the height of the trans-Atlantic slave trade.

Across Africa, prisoners of war were taken as slaves, and others were enslaved in payment for debt or as punishment for crime. This enslavement was usually on a small scale. Africans usually enslaved 'other' people, not their own particular ethnic, or cultural, group. This small scale slave trade was enough to supply the demand for slaves within Africa, but not enough to supply the demand from outside particularly from Europeans thus warfare and raids to get slaves and the kidnapping of individuals increased. Europeans wanted the slaves to work on the land they owned on the Caribbean islands and in the Americas. They were a more plentiful source of labor than indentured servants. It is possible that Muslims were amongst the 20 Africans brought to the settlement at Jamestown Virginia in 1619.

For the thousands of Muslims that were captured and eventually settled in North America maintaining their religion was difficult and often impossible. Many were forcibly converted to Christianity. Any effort to practice Islam or keep their traditional names or clothing was quashed and had to be done in

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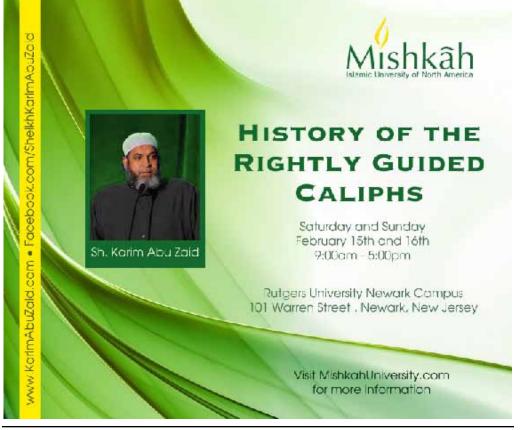
There is No Racism in Islam

Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) tells us in his final sermon:

"All mankind is from Adam and Eve, an Arab has no superiority over a non-Arab has any superiority over an Arab; also a white has no superiority over black nor a black has any superiority over white; except by piety and good action. Learn that every Muslim is a brother to every Muslim and that the Muslims constitute one brotherhood. Nothing shall be legitimate to a Muslim which belongs to a fellow Muslim unless it was given freely and willingly. Do not, therefore, do injustice to yourselves."

Allah does not favor one race over another.

When many people think of Islam, they think of Arabs. Many non-Muslims don't realize that less than 15% of Muslims are actually Arab. And not many Muslims know that out of the six scholars who saved the sunnah, only Dawood was Arab. The others: Bukhari, Muslim, at-Tirmidhi, an-Nisaai, Ibn Maja, were not Arab. Salahadin was not an Arab either. Many of the leaders and many of those who fought for Islam, including but not limited to Qutuz, Tariq ibn Zyad, Imad ad-Din, Zengi, were reverts and were not Arab either. This should not take away recognition from the Arabs in history who have contributed so highly to Islam. Researching the history of these men in Islam shows that Islam is for all people for all time. Islam connects all nations together with one message 'La illaha ill Allah.'



Dawah Monthly Magazine 2 February 2014 February 2014 3 Dawah Monthly Magazine

From Africa to America - Cont'd.

secret. However evidence of Muslim origins can be found throughout documented history. Handwritten verses from the Quran have been found and reveal the high levels of education attained by the authors in Africa prior to enslavement. It is known that slave masters often placed Muslim slaves as supervisors over their fellow bondsmen. In addition to this Muslim names can be found in reports of runaway slaves and among the rosters of soldiers in the American war of Independence.

In 1984 the noted scholar of antebellum black writing and history Dr. Allan D. Austin published a book called African Muslims in Antebellum America: A Sourcebook. It explores, via portraits, documents, maps, and texts, the lives of 50 Muslim Africans caught in the slave trade between 1730 and 1860. This book was updated and republished in 1997 and entitled African Muslims in Antebellum America: Transatlantic Stories and Spiritual Struggles. What follows are several brief biographies or snapshots of some of the Muslims captured and enslaved in the then fledgling nation of the USA.

Job Ben Solomon was born Ayyub ibn Sulayman ibn Ibrahim around 1702 in what is now Senegal. He was from a family of religious scholars, and by age 15 was a co-Imam with his father. While on a trading expedition, Job was captured in enemy territory and sold to the British. He was then sold on to work in the tobacco fields of Maryland. He did not convert to Christianity but prayed openly and adhered to Islamic dietary guidelines. Job ran

away from his plantation only to be captured and put in jail and later returned to his master. Filled with sadness he wrote a letter to his father and this letter found its way into the hands of a British philanthropist named James Oglethorpe. This man helped free Job who then started his journey home via England. On the ship journey to England Job was taught to write English and whilst in England he wrote the Quran three times from memory, and is reported to have helped with the famous George Sale translation. He called people to Islam by refuting their claims of Jesus' divinity and was also elected to the Spalding Gentlemen's Society, which may have put him in the company of Sir Isaac Newton and Alexander Pope.

The story of Yarrow Mamout has been bequeathed to us via conversations he had with the artist painting his portrait. His life in Africa is unknown but due to his good and well-mannered behaviour he was freed after laying the bricks for his master's home. As a free man he bought his own home in Georgetown and was known for praying in the streets and for his sobriety.

In December of 1807, a man known as S'Quash was brought to South Carolina. He was known to be an excellent horseman and literate in Arabic. Historians point to his marriage to a Muslim slave from Sudan to indicate that he was also a Muslim.

Aisha Stacey www.IslamReligion.com



Human Rights and Justice in Islam

Islam provides many human rights for the individual. The following are some of these human rights that Islam protects.

The life and property of all citizens in an Islamic state are considered sacred, whether a person is Muslim or not. Islam also protects honor. So, in Islam, insulting others or making fun of them is not allowed. The Prophet Muhammad, may the mercy and blessings of God be upon him, said: "Truly your blood, your property, and your honor are inviolable."

Racism is not allowed in Islam, for the Quran speaks of human equality in the following terms:

"O mankind, We have created you from a male and a female and have made you into nations and tribes for you to know one another. Truly, the noblest of you with God is the most pious. Truly, God is All-Knowing, All-Aware." (Quran 49:13)

Islam rejects certain individuals or nations being favored because of their wealth, power, or race. God created human beings as equals who are to be distinguished from each other only on the basis of their faith and piety. The Prophet Muhammad said: "O people! Your God is one and your forefather (Adam) is one. An Arab is not better than a non-Arab and a

non-Arab is not better than an Arab, and a red (i.e. white tinged with red) person is not better than a black person and a black person is not better than a red person, except in piety."

One of the major problems facing mankind today is racism. The developed world can send a man to the moon but cannot stop man from hating and fighting his fellow man. Ever since the days of the Prophet Muhammad, Islam has provided a vivid example of how racism can be ended. The annual pilgrimage (Hajj) to Makkah shows the real Islamic brotherhood of all races and nations, when about two million Muslims from all over the world come to Makkah to perform the pilgrimage.

Islam is a religion of justice. God has said: "Truly God commands you to give back trusts to those to whom they are due, and when you judge between people, to judge with justice...." (Quran 4:58)

And He has said:

"...And act justly. Truly, God loves those who are just." (Quran 49:9)

We should even be just with those who we hate, as God has said:

"...And let not the hatred of others make you avoid justice. Be just: that is nearer to piety...." (Quran 5:8)

The Prophet Muhammad said: "People, beware of injustice, for injustice shall be darkness on the Day of Judgment."

And those who have not gotten their rights (i.e. what they have a just claim to) in this life will receive them on the Day of Judgment, as the Prophet said: "On the Day of Judgment, rights will be given to those to whom they are due (and wrongs will be redressed)..."

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Dawah Monthly Magazine 4 February 2014 February 2014 5 Dawah Monthly Magazine

From Slavery To Freedom

The Story of Bilal ibn Rabah - Islam's First Muezzin

"I was present.... when Mohammad, the Messenger of God, walked the earth. I heard what he said and saw what he did..." So begins a book based on the life of one of Prophet Muhammad's closest companions – Bilal Ibn Rabah.

Bilal-Ibn-Rabahl.jpgBilal was a black slave, almost certainly the son of slaves, and is believed to have been from Abyssinia (now known as Ethiopia). Being born into servitude, he probably never expected life to offer him more than hard work, pain and drudgery. However Bilal walked the earth at a very momentous time. He was a slave in the city of Mecca when an unlettered man began to call the people to worship One God. This man was Muhammad, the Messenger of God, may the mercy and blessings of God be upon him, and his message was for all of humanity.

When a person is poor or destitute, hungry or afraid, or beaten bruised and broken, a message infused with the concepts of mercy, forgiveness and justice is very appealing. The down trodden were just the sort of people who flocked to the side of Prophet Muhammad, eager to take comfort in his words, and deeds. Bilal, possibly the first African to convert to Islam accepted the message whole heartedly. Life for Bilal was about to get a great deal worse. Like a drowning man holding the rope that will drag him to safety, Bilal clung to the words of the One God and they were essential in saving his life.

Bilal heard the message of Muhammad, that God is One, the Almighty, All Merciful but he also heard the words of his owner. Umayya ibn Khalaf, a wealthy Meccan, was worried that his livelihood based around idol worship would be disrupted by Muhammad's message. He spoke to others also concerned about the changes to the political and religious landscape of Mecca saying, "Muhammad was never a liar, magician, or mad, but we have to describe him this way until we turn away from

him those who rush to his religion."

According to biographer Ibn Ishaq and others, Bilal suffered terribly for his immediate acceptance of Muhammad's message. It is said that he was beaten mercilessly, dragged around the streets and hills of Mecca by his neck, and subjected to long periods without food or water. His owner Umayya ibn Khalaf reportedly, "would bring him out at the hottest part of the day and throw him on his back in the open valley and have a great rock put on his chest; then he would say to him, 'You will stay here till you die or deny Muhammad and worship al-Lat and al-'Uzza". Bilal would not renounce Islam, and amidst his suffering he uttered only one word – Ahad (meaning One God)

News of the slave who cried out 'God is One!' even in the midst of torture soon reached Prophet Muhammad and his companions. Abu Bakr, Prophet Muhammad's closest friend and a wealthy trader of equal status to Umaya was sent to investigate. He came upon the open field where Bilal was being tortured for amusement. Abu Bakr did not lose his temper, for that was not his way, but he remonstrated with the torturers. He said to Umaya, "Have you no fear of God that you treat this poor man like this?" He replied saying: "You are the one who corrupted him, so you save him from his plight!" Abu Bakr replied: "Then sell him to me, name your price." Umaya, was a businessman and could not give up making a profit, so he sold Bilal for a good price. To humiliate Bilal, he added: "I would have sold him to you even if you had offered me only an ounce of gold." Abu Bakr answered: "I would have bought him even if you had asked for one hundred ounces."

Bilal was cared for and nursed back to health. Upon his recovery he was taken to Prophet Muhammad and he stood by his side giving support and calling others to Islam. At the time of Prophet Muhammad slavery was a worldwide, entrenched institution. The laws of Islam sought to emancipate slaves; God mentions in the Quran the expiation for many sins is to free a slave, and it is regarded as an act of piety.

Bilal loved to be in the company of Prophet Muhammad and became exceptionally close to him. Various traditions mention Bilal having the honour of waking the Prophet each morning and spending as much time as possible in his company. The story of Bilal is often used to demonstrate the importance of pluralism and racial equality in Islam. More importantly it is an example of piety being the measure of a man, rather than race, ethnicity or social status.

Bilal Ibn Rabah's acceptance of Islam is a powerful story, involving slavery, conversion, torture, and rescue. It touches on aspects of racism, is a lesson in pluralism, and teaches us that piety is the only way to measure of a person's worth. Bilal's story is also the story of the adhaan, or call to prayer, for Bilal was also Islam's first muaddhin

Across the globe, one of the most poignant symbols of Islam is the melodious call to prayer. Its sublime sound rings out across cities and meadows, on beaches, in fertile fields and in barren valleys. Once heard, the sound of the adhaan is never forgotten and many people have entered the religion of Islam simply from hearing this soulful sound. Adthaan, which means announcement is mentioned only once in the Quran but never the less, it plays an integral part in the life of a Muslim.

For those born into Islam it is often the first sound they hear. Immediately after birth, the father or any other important Muslim in the child's life holds the newborn and whispers the words of adhaan into his right ear. The time for prayer is announced five times per day, from lofty minarets or from watches and computers. When a Muslim hears the adhaan, preparation for prayer begins. Bilal, because of his beautiful voice had the honour of being the first man in the world to call the Adthaan and call the worshippers to prayer.

"O believers, when proclamation is made for prayer on the Day of Congregation, hasten to God's remembrance and leave business aside; that is better for you, if you did but know." (Quran 62:9)

In the year 622 Prophet Muhammad, Bilal and most of the fledgling Muslim community migrated to Medina. It was here that Prophet Muhammad, may the mercy and blessings of God be upon him, began the work of setting up the Muslim nation. Bilal was at his side whenever possible and as one commentator said, "Every event in Mohammad's life was an event in the life of Bilal". It is said that Bilal was so close to Prophet Muhammad he had the duty of waking him in the mornings.

According to authentic traditions Prophet Muhammad was concerned and anxious to find a way to summon the Muslims to prayer. He wanted something unique. It was here that Abdullah bin Zaid, one of the Companions, informed the Prophet about a dream that he had.

'There appeared to me in a dream a man who was wearing two green garments, in whose hand was a bell. I said, "O slave of God, will you sell that bell?" he said, "What will you do with it?" I said, "We will call the people to prayer with it." He said, "Shall I not show you something better than that?" I said, "Yes." He said, "Say, Allaahu akbar Allaah akbar ..."

God is great! God is great! I testify that there is no true deity but God. I testify that Muhammad is the messenger of God. Come to prayer! Come to prayer! Come to salvation! God is great! God is great! There is no true deity but God.

The Tradition continues. 'Prophet Muhammad listened to the description of the dream and said, "This is a true dream, (meaning a dream sent by God). Get Bilal and tell him what you have seen, teach him the words so that he can give the call, because he has a beautiful voice." So I went to Bilal and told him my dream, so he gave the call to prayer. Umar ibn al-Khattab heard the call while still in his house; he rushed out, dragging his cloak behind him, saying, "By the One who sent you with the truth, O Messenger of God,

Continued Page 10

Dawah Monthly Magazine 6 February 2014 February 2014 7 Dawah Monthly Magazine

The Story of Bilal ibn Rabah - Islam's First Muezzin - Continued

I saw the same dream." Prophet Muhammad was pleased and said "Praise be to God."

In the decade after the migration Bilal accompanied Prophet Muhammad on all his military expeditions, and had the honour of carrying Prophet Muhammad's spear. He fought in the Battle of Badr, and in the aftermath he killed his former master, Umaya ibn Khalaf. Bilal was also present at the battle of Uhud and the battle of the Trench.

Bilal's life after his conversion to Islam contained many moments of great joy however his finest hour must have been in 630 BCE, on an occasion regarded as one of the most hallowed moments in Islamic history. After the Muslim forces had conquered Mecca, Bilal ascended to the top of the Kaba, the house of God, to call the believers to prayer. This was the first time the call to prayer was heard within Islam's holiest city.

After the death of Prophet Muhammad, Bilal never felt the same again. A day after the Prophet's death, Bilal went to make the usual adhaan for morning prayer. While giving the adhaan he broke down and steams of tears began to roll freely down his cheeks. He managed to finish the rest of the adhaan in a low voice. After that, Bilal stopped calling the Adthaan in Madina.

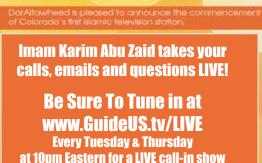
The memories of Madina were too hard for him to live with, and he left for another place. Later, upon his visit to Madina at the behest of the Prophet Muhammad's grandsons he agreed to give the Adthaan. Old memories that lay deep down in his heart were revived and those who had experienced the golden days with Prophet Muhammad could not hold back their tears

It is believed that Bilal died in Syria between 638 and 642BCE. Imam al-Suyuti in his book 'Tarikh al-Khulafa' writes, "He (Bilal) died in Damascus when he was just over sixty years old." Others are of the opinion that he died in Medina. We can be sure that his eternal abode is Paradise for Prophet Muhammad, may the mercy and blessings of God be upon him, called Bilal "a man of paradise".

Aisha Stacey www.IslamReligion.com

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Islam in America During the Slavery Years

Muslims have been part of American history since pre-Columbus times. Indeed, early explorers used maps that were derived from the work of Muslims, with their advanced geographical and navigational information of the time.

Some scholars estimate that 10-20 percent of the slaves brought over from Africa were Muslims. The film "Amistad" alluded to this fact, portraying Muslims aboard this slave vessel trying to perform their prayers, while chained together on deck as they crossed the Atlantic. Personal narratives and histories are harder to find, but some stories have been passed on from reliable sources:

-- Omar Ibn Said (ca. 17701864) was born in the Muslim state
of Futa Toro in Western Africa, in present-day
Senegal. He was a Muslim scholar and trader
who was captured and enslaved. He arrived in
South Carolina in 1807, and was sold to James
Owen of North Carolina.

Omar Ibn Said
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His owner James Cooper wrote: "He is a strict Mahometan (sic); abstains from spirituous liquors, and keeps various fasts, particularly that of the Ramadan..."

-- Lamen Kebe was a slave who used to be

a school teacher in Africa. He shared information about the texts and teaching methods used in the Islamic schools of his country.

-- Abdul Rahman Ibrahim Sori spent 40 years in slavery before he returned to Africa to die. He wrote two autobiographies, and signed a charcoal sketch of himself by Henry Inman, which was featured on the cover of "Freedman's Journal" and is on display in the Library of Congress.

Many of the Muslim slaves

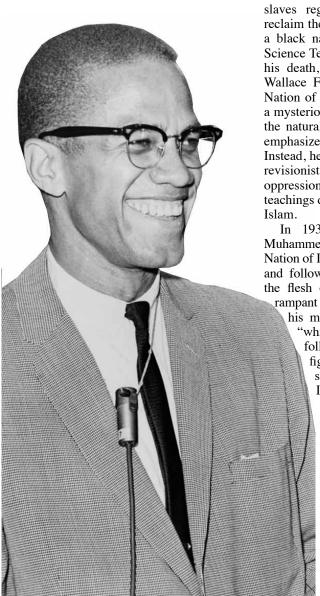
were encouraged or forced to convert to Christianity. Many of the first-generation slaves retained much of their Muslimidentity, but under the harsh slavery conditions this identity was largely lost to later generations. (cont'd pg.10)



Dawah Monthly Magazine 8 February 2014 February 2014 9 Dawah Monthly Magazine

Islam in America During the Civil Rights Era

Most people, when they think of African-American Muslims, think of the "Nation of Islam." Certainly, there is an historical importance to how Islam took hold among African-Americans, but we will see how this initial introduction transformed in modern times.



Among the reasons why African-Americans have been and continue to be drawn to Islam are 1) the Islamic heritage of West Africa from where many of their ancestors had come; and 2) the absence of racism in Islam in contrast to the brutal and racist enslavement they had endured.

In the early 1900s, a few black leaders strived to help the recently-freed African slaves regain a sense of self-esteem and reclaim their heritage. Noble Drew Ali started a black nationalist community, the Moorish Science Temple, in New Jersey in 1913. After his death, some of his followers turned to Wallace Fard, who founded the Lost-Found Nation of Islam in Detroit in 1930. Fard was a mysterious figure who declared that Islam is the natural religion for Africans, but did not emphasize the orthodox teachings of the faith. Instead, he preached black nationalism, with a revisionist mythology explaining the historical oppression of the black people. Many of his teachings directly contradicted the true faith of

In 1934, Fard disappeared and Elijah Muhammed took over the leadership of the Nation of Islam. Fard became a "Savior" figure, and followers believed that he was Allah in the flesh on earth. The poverty and racism rampant in the urban northern states made his message about black superiority and

"white devils" more widely accepted. His follower Malcolm X became a public figure during the 1960s, although he separated himself from the Nation of Islam before his death in 1965.

Muslims look to Malcolm X (later known as Al-Hajj Malik Shabaaz) as an example of one who, at the end of his life, rejected the racially-divisive teachings of the Nation of Islam and embraced the true brotherhood of Islam. His letter from Mecca, written during his pilgrimage, shows the transformation that had taken place. As we shall see shortly, most African-Americans have made this transition as well, leaving behind the "black nationalist" Islamic organizations to enter the worldwide brotherhood of Islam. (cont'd pg. 11)

Islam in America Today

The number of Muslims in the United States today is estimated to be between 6-8 million. According to several surveys commissioned between 2006-2008, African-Americans make up about 25% of the Muslim population of the U.S.

The vast majority of African-American Muslims have embraced orthodox Islam and have rejected the racially-divisive

teachings of the Nation of Islam. Warith Deen Mohammed, a son of Elijah Mohammed, helped lead the community through a transition away from his father's black nationalist teachings, to join the mainstream Islamic faith.

The number of Muslim immigrants to the United States has increased in recent years, as

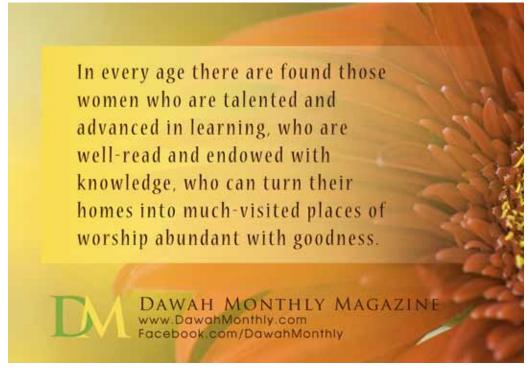
has the number of native-born converts to the faith. Among immigrants, Muslims come largely from Arab and South Asian countries. A major study conducted by Pew Research Center in 2007 found that American Muslims are mostly middle-class, well-educated, and "decidedly American in their outlook, values and attitudes."

Today, Muslims in America

represent a colorful mosaic that is unique in the world. African-Americans, Southeast Asians.

North Africans, Arabs, and Europeans come together daily for prayer and support, united in faith, with the understanding that they are all equal before God.

-- Islam in America - Three-Part Series by Huda, About.com



Dawah Monthly Magazine 10 February 2014 February 2014 11 Dawah Monthly Magazine

The Prophet Muhammad's Last Sermon

This sermon was delivered on the Ninth Day of Dhul Hijjah 10 A.H. in the 'Uranah valley of Mount Arafat' (in Mecca).

After praising, and thanking Allah he said:

"O People, lend me an attentive ear, for

I know not whether after this year, I shall ever be amongst you again. Therefore listen to what I am saying to you very carefully and TAKE THESE WORDS TO THOSE WHO COULD NOT BE PRESENT HERE

TODAY.

O People, just as you regard this month, this day, this city as Sacred, so regard the life and property of every Muslim as a sacred trust. Return the goods entrusted to you to their rightful owners. Hurt no one so that no one may hurt you. Remember that you will indeed meet your LORD, and that HE will indeed reckon your deeds. ALLAH has forbidden you to take usury (interest), therefore all interest obligation shall henceforth be waived. Your capital, however, is yours to keep. You will neither inflict nor suffer any inequity. Allah has Judged that there shall be no interest and that all the interest due to Abbas ibn 'Abd'al Muttalib (Prophet's uncle) shall

Beware of Satan, for the safety of your religion. He has lost all hope that he will ever be able to lead you astray in big things, so beware of following him in small things.

henceforth be waived...

O People, it is true that you have certain rights with regard to your women, but they also have rights over you. Remember that you have taken them as your wives only under Allah's trust and with His permission. If they abide by your right then to them belongs the right to be fed and clothed in kindness. Do treat your

women well and be kind to them for they are your partners and committed helpers. And it is your right that they do not make friends with any one of whom you do not approve, as well as never to be unchaste.

O People, listen to me in earnest, worship ALLAH, say your five daily prayers (Salah), fast during the month of Ramadan, and give your wealth in Zakat (charity). Perform Hajj if you can afford to.

All mankind is from Adam and Eve, an Arab has no superiority over a non-Arab nor a non-Arab has any superiority over an Arab; also a white has no superiority over black nor a black has any superiority over white; except by piety and good action. Learn that every Muslim is a brother to every Muslim and that the Muslims constitute one brotherhood. Nothing shall be legitimate to a Muslim which belongs to a fellow Muslim unless it was given freely and willingly. Do not, therefore, do injustice to yourselves.

Remember, one day you will appear before ALLAH and answer your deeds. So beware, do not stray from the path of righteousness after I am gone.

O People, no prophet or apostle will come after me and no new faith will be born. Reason well, therefore, O People, and understand words which I convey to you. I leave behind me two things, the QURAN and my example, the SUNNAH and if you follow these you will never go astray.

All those who listen to me shall pass on my words to others and those to others again; and may the last ones understand my words better than those who listen to me directly. Be my witness, O ALLAH, that I have conveyed your message to your people".

For Questions about Islam, Comments, Suggestions or other inquiries about this publication please contact: **Editor@DawahMonthly.com**

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